

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1886

INFO AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 0341

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, SN

SUBJECT: TRIAL OF STUDENT LEADER DRAGS ON

REFS: (A) SINGAPORE 4461; (B) SINGAPORE 4950

1. THE TRIAL OF UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE STUDENTS UNION PRESIDENT TAN WAH PIOW AND TWO CO-DEFENDANTS ON CHARGE OF RIOTING ENTERED ITS SEVENTH WEEK TODAY. TAN AND CO-DEFENDANTS, TWO INDUSTRIAL WORKERS, ALLEGEDLY CAUSED DAMAGE TO THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE PIONEER INDUSTRIAL EMPLOYEES UNION DURING THE COURSE OF AN OCTOBER 30 DEMONSTRATION IN PROTEST AGAINST THE ABRUPT LAY-OFF OF 1,140 WORKERS AT THE AMERICAN MARINE SHIPYARD IN SINGAPORE. (SEE REF A).

2. THE PAST TEN DAYS OF THE TRIAL HAVE BEEN DEVOTED TO THE EXHAUSTIVE EXAMINATION AND CROSS-EXAMINATION OF THREE DEFENSE WITNESSES--TWO WORKERS AND A STUDENT WHO WERE ALLEGEDLY PRESENT AT THE OCTOBER 30 INCIDENT AND HAVE TESTIFIED THAT TAN WAS OUTSIDE THE UNION BUILDING WHEN THE DISTURBANCE TOOK PLACE INSIDE. THE STUDENT WITNESS, MR. CHUA CHONG LAI, IS ONE OF FIVE MALAYSIAN STUDENTS EXPELLED FROM SINGAPORE ON DECEMBER 11 BECAUSE OF INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL POLITICS. (THE JUDGE GRANTED TAN'S MOTION THAT HE BE PERMITTED TO RETURN TO TESTIFY.)

3. THE PROSECUTION HAS ATTEMPTED TO DISCREDIT THE DEFENSE

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WITNESSES BY SUGGESTING THAT THEY WERE EITHER RECRUITED BY TAN WAH

PIOW TO INCITE THE STUDENTS AGAINST THE RECOGNIZED TRADE UNION, HAD LIED TO THE COURT IN ORDER TO PROTECT TAN, OR HAD ADVOCATED OPPOSITION AGAINST THE SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT FOR THE SAKE OF OPPOSITION.

4. MEANWHILE, THE CAMPUS HAS LAPSED INTO "BUSINESS AS USUAL" AFTER THE INITIAL DEMONSTRATIONS PROTESTING THE EXPULSION OF THE SIX FOREIGN STUDENTS. IF TAN WAH PIOW IS CONVICTED AND SENTENCED TO JAIL, MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THERE WILL BE A BRIEF RESURGENCE OF STUDENT PROTEST ACTIVITY.

5. IF THE TRIAL IS PROLONGED FOR AN ADDITIONAL THREE WEEKS, THE STUDENT RESPONSE TO THE VERDICT WILL BE MINIMIZED BECAUSE OF PRE-OCCUPATION WITH ANNUAL EXAMS, WHICH BEGIN IN MID- FEBRUARY. SO FAR NEITHER TAN NOR THE SOLICITOR GENERAL HAS EXHIBITED ANY INCLINATION TO BRING THE TRIAL TO A SPEEDY END.

6. THE STRAITS TIMES HAS CONTINUED TO PUBLISH LENGTHY REPORTS OF THE TRIAL. THE CHINESE PRESS HAS ALSO COVERED THE TRIAL. THE CHINESE PRESS HAS ALSO COVERED THE TRIAL ON A DAILY BASIS. CRONK

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